

## The First African Games in Brazzaville

At the time we write these lines great excitement must reign in Brazzaville. They are preparing to celebrate the First African Games there from 18 to 25 July.

These Games have all the more appeal for us as they give form to one of the ideas, over forty years after he conceived it, of that bold innovator Pierre de Coubertin — an idea which it then proved impossible to realize. “Sport will conquer Africa” he wrote in one of those undated notes for which he had the knack but which one can situate in the months preceding the Games of the VIIIth Olympiad held in Paris. “The time has come for sport to advance to the conquest of Africa, that vast continent which it has as yet hardly touched and to bring to its people the enjoyment of ordered and disciplined muscular effort, with all the benefits which flow from it. In this aim the International Olympic Committee has instituted the African Games, principally for African nationals, to be inaugurated at Alexandria in Egypt in 1927, and to be repeated every two years...” A medal for *keen sportsmanship* was to be struck as an encouragement, out of the proceeds of a subscription opened among all the athletes and competing sportsmen of the world, and awarded to African Youth by the representatives of the universal Olympic Movement meeting in Paris for the 1924 Games. The President of the French Republic was kind enough to head the subscription list...



Events decided it was not to be so, but France was nevertheless to play a primary role in the starting of these African Games so dear to Pierre de Coubertin. For the Brazzaville Games organized by the independent countries of Africa for the independent countries of Africa are the direct result of the *Communauté* Games held in Tananarive (Madagascar) early in 1960, then in Abidjan (Ivory Coast) at Christmas 1960 and which became in 1963, in Dakar (Senegal), the Games of the *Amitié* — the Friendship Games. The first two of this series of meetings, as their name indicates, were reserved for French-speaking African countries members of the *Communauté*. France, as the sponsor, sent a team. The Dakar Games were given a new dimension by the participation of certain English-speaking countries. Twenty-three African states had answered the call of the *Amitié* — of Friendship. The impetus was given, the movement launched, France announced that she would not take part in the 1965 Brazzaville Games — not that she lost interest ; the technical assistance continued. But the time had come for Africa to celebrate her own games. From the *Amitié* sprung the African Games.

Meanwhile, as a natural and nonetheless gratifying consequence of this trend, Africa was joining to the Olympic Movement in force. In 1961, the International Olympic Committee recognized thirteen African national committees, all in Northern Africa or in English-speaking countries. An I.O.C. commission chaired with dynamism by the Comte de Beaumont concentrated on establishing contacts with the sports associations of the countries not yet recognized, and on promoting their affiliation to the Olympic Movement. In the space of four years, thirteen new African national olympic committees were formed, approved and recognized by the I.O.C.



As Mr. Avery Brundage, President of the I.O.C., stated in an address to the African sports leaders assembled in Dakar during the Games of the *Amitié*, we have much to learn from them. We who increasingly forget that Man, if he is to keep a balance, must fit as harmoniously into nature as into the civilized world, are astonished to discover that the Africans need no introduction to the principle of sport and its virtues, unlike the people of many countries, in Europe for example, with whom an almost completely fresh start has to be made in each generation. Physical exercise is part of African life. It is a means of *communication*, of locomotion, of expression. What more natural than that sport should have attracted gifted people who love the open air and who are already brought up to be supple in exertion and rhythmic in movement. It has been included as an integral part of the school curriculum just as the alphabet and arithmetic are included. Once recognized as an integral part of education, sport cannot be divorced from it. Its development contributes to the development of Africa, and *vice versa*.

African sport is a lesson in beauty, and in freedom, too. Who does not remember the great attraction of the African delegations in Tokyo ? The ease of their step, their noble carriage, the dignity of their manner. Full of gaiety, nonetheless, and keen. How well the Olympic scene suited these athletes, draped in their robes like the Ancient Greeks in their cloaks !

The International Olympic Committee has given its patronage to the First African Games. So the white flag with its five rings will float in the Brazzaville stadium, beside the flag of the Games. A moving sign that the seal is posed, the exchange made and that the Olympic Movement has conquered Africa and that Africa has conquered the Olympic Movement. Forty years after his illustrious predecessor, Pierre de Coubertin, formed the wish to do so, Mr. Avery Brundage will attend the First African Games. This amateur of oriental and hellenic culture is at home in Africa, where the Heads of State, like the leaders of those earlier civilizations, are also poets. We shall leave the last word to one of them, the President of the Senegalese Republic, Mr. Leopold Sédar Senghor, who offers us a study of the African heritage in later pages :

“Sport does not only demand the vigour and beauty of the body ; it demands the willpower and finesse that are the vigour and beauty of the spirit — the ‘sporting spirit’ that unites the hearts.

“This is the meaning of the Olympic Games of Ancient Greece.

“Africa has not neglected such games. The tradition of gymnastics is unbroken here in Senegal, where the athlete is considered to be at the same time an artist, since he is both dancer and poet.

“My most cherished wish is that a new Pindar should tomorrow appear on this earth — nay, a new Marième N'Diaye, to sing of the best athletes — Marième, the poetess of my village, who used to sing the praises of M'Baye, son of Tening :

*When you take to your marks*

*The young men tremble,*

*The young girls applaud ;*

*M'Baye son of Tening, our praise knows no bounds.”*

*Myriam Meuwly.*



“Many people believe that the Negro is a man without a past.

“...The development of knowledge shows that this opinion concerning African achievements, or the absence of such achievements, rests on a foundation of truth no more solid than the ancient belief that the Niger flowed towards the West. Geographical discovery has proved that the Niger in actual fact flows towards the East. Historical discovery is now showing us that the development and growth of society and civilization in Africa really contradict the cliché of ‘many centuries of stagnation’.

“The world is changing its mind about Africa's past.”

Basil Davidson (*Africa before the Whites*).